



Madison County Genealogical Society



Madison County Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031
mcgs@telebeep.com

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nemcgs/
www.nesgs.org/~mcgs

GERMAN RESEARCH By Bernice Walters

My genealogical research has been primarily German as my parents immigrated to America in 1922. I corresponded with our cousins on my mother's side, who had moved to west Germany before the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, and made notes of the stories and family history mom told me over the years. So ask your parents and grandparents (while they are still living!) about their earlier lives and siblings--this is an excellent and easy way to begin recording one's family history.

I first wrote to the church in Leipzig where mom and dad had been married, for more information on dad's family who had lived there. They sent my letter to Berlin, then Dresden, then to a church archivist near the Czech border and he made a special trip to the little village church on the Elbe River, sending me the first documents on my Tinius grandfather and great-grandfather in that area south of Leipzig. This researcher retired soon after, but gave me the name of another church archivist in mom's home village of Luckendorf near Zittau. I corresponded with him in German, and over 8 years he copied all the church records on mom's Richter-Arnold lines in those villages, going back to 1500s.

This Zittau researcher was a professional and knew exactly how to do it—one generation at a time with all names, dates, occupations, residence, etc. His examples gave me a clue what to ask for in writing to other archives and churches for additional information.

Whether it is genealogy research here in the United States, or foreign, family research takes time and patience. It is not unusual for a month or 2 to pass before a query receives attention and reply. If a follow up letter is sent, to speed up the process it is recommended to include a copy of the original letter. I always try to make it as easy as possible for a church office or archive to find exactly the information I am requesting -- and ask for only two or three items per letter. This gets more results in the long run, as a lengthy request or asking for "whatever information is available", is more likely to be laid aside for later attention. Many small village churches have limited staff available, and pastors are not obligated to do such "family history research".

Even though I speak, read and write some German and have cousins all over Germany, I soon found that getting information from eastern Germany (then the German Democratic Republic –DDR) was not so easy. Researching my dad's lines involved many letters to various German offices, even after the East German

Embassy in Washington, D.C. sent forms with vital statistics on dad's parents and siblings, all of whom lived in Leipzig.

Although I received all of my vital statistics from German offices and archives, I also checked sources in the Family History Library (LDS) here in Norfolk for background material. Their records can be very helpful once you know the province or city of your ancestors. One pamphlet was very helpful: "How To Write A Letter In German". So I have made copies to distribute to everyone here, as the information applies to any genealogy queries whether in this country, or European. It covers the proper introduction, and gives examples of how to request various vital statistics, as well as how payment is to be made and closing remarks. Copies of this form will be on file in our Museum Library.

Open discussion by members covered the use of the Internet for sources—Cyndi's List being one very easy to use with numerous links, also Genealogy.net, which is a German site, with some English. Much general information is available today on the Internet, requiring a lot of time and patience, but it's well worth checking the many links available. The German area of Hanover is currently one that I am researching, which is of interest to some members, and I will be sharing whatever detail and facts I may be able to learn.

In closing, I want to emphasize that it is important to determine as near as possible, the state, or city, or village of your ancestry, no matter what country, in order to write the official registry office. Family history is a fascinating hobby and much more easily done today than in the past, due largely to Internet sources available for research, many of them free.